

Department of Human Services

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(517) 373-7394



Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, March 20, 2007

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'Rose's law' needed?

Tragedy's details show state didn't protect as it should

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, March 20, 2007

The staggering conditions in which 5-year-old Rose Kelley died last June in her filthy Flint home must lead us all to ask: What could have been done to spare this child from the suffering that led to her fate?

Ultimately, in such cases, we have to expect that the state Department of Human Services will make the right decisions. But based on DHS records it's hard to conclude that it did, despite oversight agencies supporting the agency's actions.

After all, the child's peril was no secret - not to her east-side neighbors, nor school authorities, nor medical and family counseling professionals, and certainly not to her family, either immediate parental or the extended relatives.

Additionally, DHS for several years knew of the filth, the cockroaches, the dog feces in the basement - and most significantly, of the incidence of head lice, a sign of the neglect that led to Rose's death from liver failure.

The heaviest penalty has fallen on Rose's parents, Michelle Bowen and Jeffrey Kelley, who are serving minimum 17-month prison sentences on convictions of involuntary manslaughter, to which they pled guilty. Their history with state DHS investigators spanned years. But when home visits were imminent, the parents sometimes were able to clean up sufficiently to stave off custody challenges, or at least offered promises of improvement that kept social workers at bay.

For DHS to move to revoke custody from parents, even poor ones, should be a last resort. But hindsight makes certain that such a point of no return had been reached in the Bowen-Kelley household.

Perhaps an even more unassailable case could have been amassed from surprise visits to the home, leaving no opportunity for the overwhelmed parents to improve conditions before inspectors arrived. However, such an ambush probably wasn't even necessary. The cumulative impact of eight years of complaints on this household should have been all that was needed to remove Rose and the other children.

The tragedy has spawned an anguished review involving the Office of Children's Ombudsman and the Office of the Family Advocate, which vindicate DHS, and some state legislators who do not.

The latter include state Rep. David Robertson, R-Grand Blanc Township, who makes the salient point that safeguarding Rose should have been paramount. Perhaps, as he suggests, new law is needed to expand the circumstances under which the courts could be asked to terminate parental rights. "You allow for due process, but at some point you say, 'Enough.'"

If such legislation is introduced, calling it "Rose's law" would seem fitting.

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Published March 20, 2007

Day care suspect charged again

Lansing man, 59, accused in assault on girl, now 10

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

A 59-year-old Lansing man already accused of sexually assaulting two children who attended his wife's home day care has been charged with molesting another girl.

Robin Terence Wood now faces two additional counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

The girl, now 10, was 9 years old when the alleged molestation occurred between December 2005 and December 2006, police said. The girl did not regularly attend the day care, but was friends with some of the children in the home, and was related to a child who attended the day care, said Lansing police Detective Elizabeth Bonello.

Wood originally was charged in February with molesting two girls, ages 4 and 5.

Preliminary hearings, which determine if the cases advance to trial, are scheduled for March 30 and April 20.

Wood's attorney, John Frawley, said he was surprised the new charges were issued. He said the girl's story has evolved, and investigators may have elicited statements in interviews that don't necessarily prove anything.

"If you're looking for something to bolster the position you've taken, you've got to be very careful you don't let that cloud how you interpret what she's saying," Frawley said.

Wood, who is free on a \$25,000 bond, faces up to life in prison if convicted.

According to Michigan law, second-degree criminal sexual conduct can involve sexual contact with the genital area, groin, inner thigh or buttock.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

What's next

- A preliminary hearing for Robin Terence Wood, regarding charges he molested a 10-year-old girl, is scheduled for March 30.

- A preliminary hearing related to charges Wood molested two young girls at the home day care run by his wife is scheduled for April 20.
- The hearings determine if the cases advance to trial.

Mar 20, 12:22 PM EDT

Court lifts order keeping accused killer's children in Michigan

By **COREY WILLIAMS**
Associated Press Writer

DETROIT (AP) -- A court order keeping the two young children of an accused killer and his slain wife in Michigan was lifted Tuesday, opening the door for an aunt to take them to Ohio.

Macomb County Circuit Court Referee Deborah Brune ruled that Tara Grant's sister, Alicia Standerfer, and her husband, Erik, continue temporary custody of the children through the Michigan Department of Human Services. Brune's ruling permits the DHS to allow the Standerfers to take the 6-year-old girl and 4-year-old boy home with them to Chillicothe, Ohio.

DHS spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet would not say Tuesday whether the agency would allow the children to leave Michigan, and a message seeking comment was left for another DHS official.

Alicia Standerfer said no decision had been made Tuesday morning by the DHS on allowing the children to leave Michigan.

"There are still things that need to be done in Ohio for them to say `yes' to us leaving (Michigan) with the children," she told The Associated Press by telephone. "As of this moment, we are still staying in Michigan."

Alicia Standerfer said their plans were to take the children later in the day to the family's Upper Peninsula cabin near Escanaba.

"The sooner we get some normalcy back to all of our lives, the better," she said.

Stephen Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski of Sterling Heights, and her husband also are seeking temporary custody of the children. Both the Standerfers and Utykanskis had been caring for the children.

Alicia Standerfer said she spoke with the Utykanskis for a few moments at Tuesday's hearing, but would not disclose what was discussed.

of murder and mutilation of a corpse. He is accused of strangling his 34-year-old wife, Tara, on Feb. 9 and later dismembering her body.

Stephen Grant told investigators he killed his wife at their Washington Township home while the children were believed to be asleep.

Brune's ruling came during an adjournment Tuesday of a pretrial hearing on custody of the Grant children.

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Article published Mar 16, 2007

Jones mother sought in child's death

Prosecutor files charges, says ill son suffered from negligence

By CAROL DRAEGER
Tribune Staff Writer

CASSOPOLIS — Authorities are looking for a Jones mother who is wanted on homicide and manslaughter charges in the death of her 8-year-old son last summer.

Court officials said Tina Gullett's oldest child, Peyton Jenkins, suffered from diabetes and cystic fibrosis when he died in her care June 14.

A few days later, officials from Michigan's Child Protective Services began looking into whether Gullett's other children, girls ages 3, 5 and 6, should be placed in foster care, according to family court records.

During a Sept. 18 settlement conference to determine if the children should be moved to foster care, Gullett pleaded no contest to failing to follow through with medical care for Peyton.

She also pleaded no contest to causing her children to miss school frequently because she moved periodically from Michigan to Ohio, where her husband, Harry, lives.

Court records also showed that her children had head lice.

During that conference, the girls were placed in foster care, court records said.

On Thursday, during a termination trial of parental rights of the children, Cass County Family Court Judge Susan Dobrich ordered that both parents, Tina and Harry Gullett, lose their parental rights over the girls.

Neither of the Gulletts was in court for the trial.

Two days earlier, on Tuesday, Cass County Prosecutor Victor Fitz signed a warrant for Tina Gullett's arrest on homicide and manslaughter charges in the death of Peyton.

Prosecutors contend that based on information from child care workers, Peyton did not receive proper medical care and died as a result of neglect.



Infant found dead behind Ypsilanti motel

March 20, 2007

By STAN DONALDSON

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office is investigating the death of an abandoned infant boy who was discovered Monday evening behind a motel in Ypsilanti Township.

Cmdr. Dave Egeler said police were called at 6:50 p.m. by a motel manager who said he found the dead infant while walking his dog in the backyard of the Manor Motel in the 2800 block of East Michigan Avenue. He said the child was found wrapped in packaging near a fence line underneath a tree.

Egeler said an autopsy would be conducted today. He said the child appeared to be a few days old. He also said it is possible the child could have been in the backyard for a few days.

"This is a sad situation. We hope the mother of the child will want to come forward to talk to us about what happened," Egeler said. "This mother is probably a scared person and was in a situation where she did not know what to do...but we need to fill in some the blanks."

Anyone with information is asked to contact the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office at 734-973-7711 or call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-773-2587.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Baby's identity sought

Autopsy may offer clues on body left in motel yard

Tuesday, March 20, 2007

BY AMALIE NASH

News Staff Reporter

Authorities are hoping someone will come forward with information on a very young infant boy, whose body was discarded in a bundle of clothing and bags behind an Ypsilanti Township motel.

The body was discovered Monday evening behind Motel Manor on East Michigan Avenue, but police said it was likely left there several days ago. Washtenaw County Sheriff's Cmdr. Dave Egeler said police won't know whether the baby was alive when he was born or how old he may have been until after an autopsy is complete today.

Egeler implored anyone who knows the identity of the mother to come forward.

"We're looking for information on a woman who was pregnant and now no longer is but doesn't have a baby, or someone who recently had a very young newborn and no longer does," Egeler said. "We're hoping the mother or someone else will come forward and clarify the sequence of events in this matter."

The manager at the motel, off East Michigan Avenue near Holmes Road, was walking his dog behind the building at 6:50 p.m. when the dog ran over to the bundle, Egeler said. The manager inspected the bundle and then called police when he realized an infant was inside, Egeler said.

The area where the infant was found is inside the fenced hotel property behind one of the buildings. Egeler said police are reviewing motel records to determine who may have been staying there and are also speaking with neighbors.

At the small motorcourt motel this morning, owner Millie Dziak said she could not discuss the case at the request of investigators. She confirmed her son found the baby boy.

The small lawn behind the hotel was cordoned off with police tape, backing up to a small wooded area that is separated from a neighborhood by a chain-link fence.

Egeler said the infant's body was by or under an evergreen tree in the back. He said police expect to release additional information following the autopsy this afternoon.

Anyone with information on the case is asked to call the Sheriff's Department at 734-971-8400 or the tip line at 973-7711.

Under an infant safe haven law in Michigan, a mother can leave a newborn infant under 72 hours old at a hospital, fire department or police station. The mother would be immune from prosecution.

Staff reporter Tracy Davis contributed to this report. Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6832.

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Saginaw Day Care Destroyed

March 19, 2007 03:43 PM EDT

(TV-5) -- A brand-new Saginaw business destroyed by fire. Dependable Day Care was expected to open within the next two weeks but after a fire completely gutted the inside - that won't happen.

A neighbor called the Saginaw Fire Department around midnight when a fire broke out in the 3000 block of Rust Street. Once on the scene, crews found that one and half rooms inside the building had caught on fire.

Right now preliminary reports are revealing possible electrical problems.

Family friends say the couple who owns the business was trying to start their second child care center. The Dependable Day Care was a home converted for day care use and would have stayed open 24 hours to meet the demands of all parents.

No one was in the daycare at the time and we're told there are no injuries to report. The owners were also insured.

Damage is estimated at \$15,000 to the building and another \$10,000 lost in equipment such as baby cribs, play things and a computer.



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Boy Confesses To Rochester School Threat

POSTED: 11:04 am EDT March 20, 2007

An 11-year-old boy confessed to making a 911 call that prompted an evacuation and search of a local school.

On March 15, someone used a payphone at West Middle School in Rochester Hills to call 911 and report that a student inside the school had a gun, according to officials.

Once the call was received, deputies reported to the school.

Sheriff's deputies and Michigan State Police troopers searched the school premises to assure there was no threat.

Nothing was found inside or around the school and investigators believed at the time that the call was simply a prank, according to officials.

On Friday, an 11-year-old student of West Middle School told school officials that he placed the call because he was bored.

The Oakland County Prosecutor's Office is seeking a juvenile petition against the boy.

Officials said the punishment is a four-year felony.

SURVEY

How strict do you think the young boy who allegedly called in a threat to a Rochester Hills school should be?

- ☐ Very strict. He needs to learn a lesson.
- ☐ He should be punished but not get jail time.
- ☐ I think he made a mistake but should not be punished.
- ☐ I am not sure.

Vote

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March 20, 2007

Faith and Policy

Domestic violence sends wakeup call to save families

Imam Mohammad Ali Elahi

Shocking stories of domestic violence -- including the recent killing of Tara Grant, allegedly by her husband, who is presumed innocent awaiting trial -- have become a wake-up call for our nation to stand up to find an effective treatment for this dangerous disease.

Family is meant to be a union of true love, loyalty, comfort and cooperation and not a center of pain, punishment, injustice and irresponsibility.

The culture of "Me, Myself and I" influenced by materialism and individualism has challenged the balance between man and woman in the family and promoted a lifestyle of selfishness, greed and domestic disharmony.

The feminist liberation movements gave women more status and rights, yet not more family happiness and stability. The divorce rate has increased, while the marital rate has declined and one-third of first births are out of wedlock.

In our three Abrahamic religious traditions, the family is the center of the society. It's impossible to have a happy, healthy and strong community without stable households.

Family values such as love, respect, sympathy, fairness, and trust strengthen society. The Quran says "protect your family from the hell fire" -- that is, to make your home a heaven of harmony and save it from the hell of hatred and other evils.

Marriage is a divine covenant between a man and a woman. Prophet Mohammad advised that piety, modesty and intellect must come before the glitter of worldly attractions in marriage. When marriage is based on the foundation of faith and the spouses feel the presence of the Lord in their life, they remain connected in good times and bad. Domestic violence is unheard of in the households of our prophets and within their faithful followers.

Being superficial in choosing a partner, followed by an expensive wedding party paid for by credit card or a mortgage, can be the first step toward stress and domestic problems. Our faith traditions encourage simplicity and humbleness as a key to comfort and domestic peace.

Although traditionally the husband is more responsible in leading and supporting the family, both spouses are equal in the sight of God. Man and woman compliment one another. No one is more or less important.

Examining the relationship between husband and wife the Quran says, "They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them" (2-187). We care for our clothes and keep them clean and that is how an intimate, caring and confidential marital relationship should be.

The prophet said, "When you love someone say it and remember that your wife would never forget those three words! I love you." Another passage says "live honorably or separate honorably," 65-2.

We need more reasonable, gender-neutral laws in dealing with divorce cases. If you don't like to live with you wife or husband, separate with respect and fairness, not taunts and selfishness.

Imam Mohammad Ali Elahi heads the Islamic House of Wisdom in Dearborn Heights. Please mail letters to The Detroit News, Editorial Page, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226, fax to (313) 222-6417 or e-mail to letters@detnews.com.

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Agencies to homeless win grants

Tuesday, March 20, 2007

MARY L. LAWRENCE

THE SAGINAW NEWS

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has awarded more than \$1.4 million to six Saginaw County agencies.

First-time and renewal grants will support nine projects offered through the Underground Railroad, Restoration Community Outreach, the Community Mental Health Authority, Emmaus House, Mustard Seed and Homes from Heaven.

The award is part of \$1.4 billion allotted to a record number of agencies that help the homeless throughout the country.

This year's award brings the total to more than \$11.3 million that Saginaw County agencies have received since 1995.

For the first time, Homes from Heaven received a \$64,305 grant to rehabilitate one or two homes to provide transitional housing for homeless individuals and families.

Homes From Heaven provides emergency lodging as well as affordable permanent housing.

The Underground Railroad, which offers transitional housing for domestic violence victims, received three grants. One, a \$290,898 three-year renewal grant, will support a homeless management information system. Serving all of Saginaw's homeless shelters, the tracking system collects confidential statistics on people seeking assistance at the shelters.

HUD also renewed the agency's civil legal assistance grant of \$56,079 for another year. A third grant is a two-year renewal of \$210,307 to provide transitional housing for Underground Railroad clients.

HUD renewed one grant and awarded two new grants to Restoration Community Outreach, 1205 Norman. A two-year \$150,000 award will provide a 24-hour shelter for the homeless. An additional two-year \$225,498 award will finance street outreach, counseling, job readiness, life-skills training, care management services and transportation for the homeless.

A \$110,256 renewal will support efforts known as Shelter Plus Care.

A \$188,496 one-year renewal of three Shelter Plus Care grants will allow the Mental Health Authority to provide rental subsidies for homeless people with severe or persistent mental illness.

HUD also renewed a \$28,920 Shelter Plus Care grant to the Emmaus House and a new \$144,600 to the Mustard Seed to serve five chronically homeless adults. New Shelter Plus Care grants are for five years, while renewals are for one year.

The Emmaus House, 733 S. 14th in Saginaw, is a Catholic-based outreach center that shelters and supports troubled women. The Mustard Seed, 1325 Cherry, is a nonprofit Catholic organization that promotes the enrichment and empowerment of the financially poor living in urban neighborhoods.

Mary L. Lawrence is a staff writer. You may reach her at 776-9676.

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Homelessness to be addressed by MHC

By CHERYLL WARREN Argus-Press Staff Writer

Monday, March 19, 2007 10:00 AM EDT

A support program to make sure inmates released from the Shiawassee County Jail have a home is helping officials at Memorial Healthcare set up a similar program that will assist people being discharged from the hospital.

In an attempt to pull together Memorial's program, representatives from the hospital met this week with Becky Zemla, vice chair of Shiawassee County Homeless Coalition, Linda Spencer of the county's community corrections and representatives from other agencies.

"Our patients are more medically fragile, and there are other obstacles and issues," said Kristi Wilson, lead social worker at Memorial. "There are issues related to a lack of insurance, no prescription coverage and lack of transportation."

Memorial's plan is patterned after a program at the jail which is less than a year old.

Representatives from agencies and organizations met over the past year to pull together a homeless prevention program among those discharged from the jail. It was coordinated by the Shiawassee County Homeless Coalition, community corrections and the jail.

A key component of the jail's plan is a network of community agencies and organizations which are available to assist people who would be homeless upon discharge. Agencies and organizations within this network may be called upon to assist with emergency shelter, personal care and food packages, emergency transportation needs and employment training.

Although there is a coordinated effort throughout the state to pull resources together to meet homeless risks, the effort at the jail formed before the statewide effort even began.

"We've helped 30 individuals in the last six months who would have been homeless when they came out of the county jail," said Becky Zemla, vice chair of Shiawassee County Homeless Coalition.

She commended Spencer and Doug Powell, jail administrator, for their efforts, adding this network formed in approximately four one-hour planning sessions.

She noted the planning sessions were followed with hours of commitment from Powell, Spencer and community agencies networking with them.

The next meeting to further develop the hospital plan will take place in May. Local agency representatives will come together with short statements about what their agencies and organizations can offer to people discharged from the hospital who lack natural supports and are at risk of homelessness.